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ABSTRACT

Confronted by complex and divisive issues and by groups seeking participation in policymaking, the Salt Lake City Board of Education adopted a shared governance policy in the middle 1970's. The policy mandated creation of two related councils at each school site. The School Improvement Council (SIC) consisted of the principal and specified school personnel; the School Community Council (SCC) incorporated the SIC and added parent-teacher association officers and other nominated parents. These councils had authority to make school level decisions by consensus within legal and district policy limits. To determine the effects of these councils, researchers used a comparative case study design to analyze council operations at four elementary, two intermediate, and two high schools. Interviews, surveys, and a review of documents provided data. This report presents the findings, dealing with the following topics: (1) the character, roles, and attitudes of council participants; (2) the scope and salience of the issues addressed and the emphasis given to the budget, personnel matters, program goals, and program evaluation; (3) the dynamics of council agenda-setting, conflict management, and response selection; and (4) the effects of council actions on school policy, school operations, educator-patron relationships, and individual council members. (PGD)

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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SALT LAKE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT'S SHARED GOVERNANCE POLICY: A STUDY OF SCHOOL-SITE COUNCILS

Prepared for The Salt Lake City School District

by

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August, 1985

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

The Purpose

In the fall of 1984 then Superintendent, Dr. M. Donald Thomas, Administrator, Dr. Stanley R. Morgan, and Public Information Officer, Rob Wakefield, requested that we conduct a study of the Salt Lake City School District's Shared Governance Policy. Our specific purpose was to describe how schools have implemented the policy by examining the manner in which school site councils operate. The findings of the first phase of the study (an overview of site councils in all schools) were submitted to district officials in April, 1985. The findings of the second phase of the study (an indepth analysis of site councils in select schools) are presented in this report.

Background

In 1973 the Salt Lake City School District was characterized by declining enrollments, employer-employee tensions, and patron dissatisfaction. The financial strains and the fractured relationships between faculty, staff, administrators, and constituencies prompted a reassessment of the district's top-down approach to decisionmaking. The complex nature and divisive potential of issues confronting the district, the pressure for broad-based involvement in the policymaking process, and the opportunity to hire a superintendent with experience in a participatory approach to decisionmaking prompted the Salt Lake City Board of Education to adopt a shared governance policy.

The Policy

The policy required that each school create a School Improvement Council

(SIC), composed of administrators, teachers, and members of the non-certified school staff and a School Community Council (SCC) composed of parents and members of the SIC. The councils were to be substantially different than previous teacher committees and parent groups. They were to operate under the principle of parity, meaning that principals, teachers, and parents would have equal power in making school-level decisions. The basic regulations concerning composition and operation of the school-site councils are outlined below.

Composition-Selection of SIC. Each elementary school's SIC was to consist of 5 members: the principal, a teacher from the primary grades, a teacher from the intermediate grades, a representative of the Salt Lake City Teachers Association, and a secretary or custodian. Each intermediate school's SIC was to consist of 8 members: the principal, an assistant principal, the student government advisor if that individual was not an administrator, a teacher from the academic disciplines, a teacher from the nonacademic disciplines, a counselor, and a secretary or custodian. Each high school's SIC was to consist of 7 members. The breakdown is identical to that of the intermediate schools, minus the counselor. Nonadministrative members were to be selected by the faculty or staff they represented.

Composition-Selection of SCC. Every SCC was to be comprised of 8 parents and the SIC. The 8 parents were to include the PTA President, the PTA Vice President, a parent nominated by the principal, a parent nominated by the PTA President, a parent nominated by the PTA Vice President, a parent recommended by the principal's nominee, a parent recommended by the PTA President's nominee, and a parent recommended by the PTA Vice-President's nominee. The SCCs were to be sensitive to minority representation and geographic balance in selecting parent members.

Operating Procedures for SIC and SCC. Each council was to meet monthly, distribute minutes to members (SCC) and school personnel (SIC), resolve conflict through consensus (as opposed to majority vote), and forward decisions to the superintendent. The SCC chair was to be elected by the SCC. Both councils were given the authority to establish ad hoc committees. The councils were to make decisions, not advise, so long as their decisions were consistent with state and federal law, local district policies, and accepted standards of ethical practice.

Research Questions

In order to describe how shared governance councils operate, we sought answers to the following questions:

1. Who participates on school-site councils?
2. What issues do the councils consider?
3. How are issues processed by the councils?
4. What is the impact of the councils?

Data Sources

A comparative case studies design was used to capture a participant perspective of site councils. The sample included 8 schools: 4 elementary, 2 intermediate, and 2 high schools. Schools were selected on the basis of 3 criteria: variation in reported ability to implement decisions and satisfy members; accessibility; and socio-economic differences. Information regarding the selection criteria was taken from the findings of the phase one study.

Data sources included interviews, surveys and documents. We interviewed all accessible SIC and SCC members in the 8 sample schools (58 school staff members and 43 parents). Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 1/2 hours.

The average time was approximately one hour. All interviews were conducted in-person, with the exception of 4 parent interviews which were conducted by telephone.

We surveyed the faculties of the 8 schools to obtain their opinions and perceptions of the school-site councils. Response rates per school ranged from 41% to 92%. In addition, we requested documents reflecting school-site council business. Agendas and minutes of council meetings were received from 7 of the 8 schools. Correspondence between the SCC and the district office was provided by one school.

PART II

THE FINDINGS

Who Participates on School-Site Councils?

Council participants can be profiled on the following dimensions: school-council experience, personal traits, reason for membership, and time investment.

School Improvement Councils

School Improvement Councils (SICs) are composed of building administrators, select teachers, and secretarial or custodial representatives. Members of the SIC tend to be "veteran" employees who have worked at the school or in the district for several years. Most are "experienced" council participants. At all sites studied, approximately one half of the members had been on the SIC at least two years. At the majority of sites, almost all members had been on the SIC for more than two years.

The SICs appear to be ethnically homogeneous. Nearly all members are Caucasian. At the elementary level, SICs are predominantly female, with male representation coming largely through the principal. At the intermediate and high school levels, SICs are relatively balanced on the gender dimension. Male members outnumber female members, but the difference is slight.

Employees become part of the SIC through positional requirements or "constituency" elections. Some individuals are, because of their positions, automatically on the SIC (namely the principal in all cases; the student government advisor in intermediate and high schools; the Salt Lake Teachers Association Representative in some instances). Most individuals, however, are elected.

Elected members (ie, faculty and staff) agree to join the SIC for a variety of reasons, the most typical being a desire to be informed about school matters, to "know what's going on around here;" a willingness to "take their turn" on school committees; and a wish to have input, "to be a voice for teachers" in the decisionmaking process. Among those interviewed for this study, three sought membership on the SIC as a means to "watch out for" their particular subject or service area; two viewed membership as an opportunity to change a specific school policy; one viewed membership as a way to "try to make it [the SIC] work."

Membership on the SIC seems to be prompted more by the desire to acquire information about and participate in the system than by the desire to alter or challenge the system. Membership also seems to be more service driven than issue driven. A few individuals approach SIC involvement with issue-specific or change-oriented objectives; most do not join the group with concrete goals or focused recommendations in mind.

While faculty-staff participation on the SIC is voluntary (ie, elected individuals can refuse to serve), it is also reluctant. Members consistently described their involvement as more of an obligation than an opportunity, as more of an acquiescence to collegial-institutional pressure than a reflection of personal preference. The degree of reluctance varies but it is apparent at all sites. Select but typical comments illustrate: "I have a duty to represent my area ... It was my turn this year ... I turned my back and they voted me in ... No one else wanted to do it ... It's better than some other committees ... I was railroaded ... Might as well get it out of the way. Everyone should do it once ... It's a necessary evil; somebody has to do it."

Although administrative participation is required, it is reportedly

valued by principals. All principals interviewed described their involvement in rather enthusiastic terms. Perhaps principals were simply reflecting a normative stance, a "blanket endorsement" of district policy. Yet, all indicated that if the SIC was not mandated, they would develop their own forum for teacher input.

The time devoted to SIC tasks ranges from five minutes to ten hours per month, depending on the regularity of meetings, the prevalence of "sub-committee" assignments, the position of the member, and the nature of the issues being addressed. At three of the sites studied, the SICs did not hold monthly meetings. Interviewees reported: "We hardly met ... Our meetings were impromptu, perfunctory ... We got together a few times on the spur of the moment." At the five other sites, members estimated that SIC tasks required about one to four hours per month, while council chairs and principals estimated their time commitment at four to ten hours per month. The differences in time were attributed to sub-committee work and meeting preparations. For all members, the time investment varies across issues, with personnel or reduction in force items being the most time-consuming topics.

In sum, the SICs are experienced, homogeneous groups, demographically reflective of the schools' faculties, but not necessarily reflective of the schools' communities. There is some evidence that the SICs are operationally responsive to their immediate constituencies. SIC agendas and minutes are, in most schools, available to all faculty. In some instances SIC actions may even be ratified by the full faculty. Survey data indicate that the vast majority of teachers perceive themselves to be quite well informed about SIC activities. The reasons for membership are consistent across cases. The reasons include a general desire for information and an apparent, albeit

reluctant, willingness to serve. Time investment varies markedly. The variance is not related, however, to the socio-economic differences of the sites selected or the grade level of the schools studied. Rather, it is related to the regularity of full or sub-committee meetings, the position of individuals in the group, and the nature of issues considered by the council.

School Community Councils

The School Community Councils (SCCs) are composed of the SICs and select parents. Parent members of the SCC tend to be experienced individuals. At least half of the parents on each council studied have been on the SCC for more than one year. Most have a record of involvement in school activities through prior or current employment as social workers, teachers, teacher aides, or teacher substitutes; through prior or current service as "room mothers," or Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and SCC members at several different schools.

Parent participants tend to be well-educated individuals who concentrate their volunteer work on youth-oriented or church-sponsored projects. All have completed high school; many have "gone beyond." On four of the councils studied all parents hold college degrees. Only a few of the parents reported that they have direct linkages with civic groups or political parties. Most described their community involvement as work with school-related functions, youth programs (eg, scouts, brownies), and church commitments.

The SCCs appear to be ethnically homogeneous. With rare exception, parent representation is Caucasian. As one parent aptly noted: "White is visible," even in schools which embrace diverse student populations. The parent explained: "There are huge cultural gaps that people don't know how to cross." A teacher concurred. "There are minority parents that come to our

school all the time, but I guess they have never been brought into the SCC." The SCCs are predominantly female. Although six of the eight schools studied have at least one male parent on their SCC, all councils are primarily female. Some women are employed; most are full time homemakers.

While administrators, faculty, and staff become a part of the SCC via their SIC affiliation, parents become a part of the SCC through personal invitation. Parents are usually "recruited" by the principal, a PTA officer, or a friend who is or has been an SCC member. In a few instances parents volunteered to serve on the SCC.

Parents agree to join the SCC for a number of reasons, the most common being a personal desire to "learn about the schools" or to "be involved with my child's education." Two parents joined the SCC because they were concerned about specific issues, namely advanced placement courses and foreign language programs; one joined in an effort to "represent minorities;" one agreed to attend because there was "no other LDS [Latter Day Saints] presence; " one consented to membership because "that's where the power is;" one reported that his business "likes to see its employees serve the community."

The reasons for parent participation on the SCC parallel the reasons for teacher involvment on the SIC. Parent participation seems to be grounded in a wish to be personally informed. Further, parent participation appears to be service as opposed to issue driven. A few parents have issue-specific concerns and change-oriented objectives. Most, however, do not seem to have particular aims in mind.

Since the SCC at two of the sites studied did not hold regular meetings this year, members reported that the SCC required "very little" time. At the other sites, estimations range from one to six hours per month. For most

members (faculty, staff, and parents), the time investment is confined to formal meetings that take one or two hours per month. For SCC chairs and some principals, the time investment increases to four or six hours per month because they prepare agendas and confer before the SCC convenes.

In sum, the SCCs tend to be experienced, educated, homogeneous groups. The SCCs are not demographically congruent with their communities on the gender dimension. Moreover, the SCCs in ethnically heterogeneous areas are not demographically congruent with their communities. Although some councils have minority representation, membership profiles do not mirror the communities' diversity. There is some evidence to indicate that SCCs attempt to communicate with parents who are not on the SCC. However, no uniform or systematic method of canvasing patrons, no routine or consistent method of disseminating agendas, minutes, or actions emerged. The reasons for membership are similar across cases. School personnel are part of the SCC because they are linked through the SIC. Parents are part of the SCC because they are invited, they have a desire to learn about the schools, and they have a desire to be involved in their children's education. Time investment varies, but the variance is not related to the grade level or the socio-economic features of the school.

What Issues Do The Councils Consider?

The issues considered by the shared governance councils can be described in terms of scope, salience, and emphasis given to what we would consider core domains: budget, personnel, program goals, and program evaluation.

Scope

Both SIC and SCC interview transcripts indicate that informants found it initially difficult to identify the major issues discussed in council meetings.

When asked what issues were considered, responses tended to be general and inclusive. SIC members answered: "Anything and everything ... Whatever comes up ... You name it, we talk about it ... The whole gamut." SCC members answered: "Anything that concerns the school and community ... What's happening at school ... It's hard to pin down ... Whatever anybody brings up." When asked to give examples of topics discussed, interview sources generated an extensive list, a wide spectrum of items ranging from recess times and reduction in force directives on the SIC to playground equipment and personnel complaints on the SCC.

Salience

While the topics are certainly varied, they are not necessarily salient (ie, important to the individual). In three SICs (50% of the SICs that met regularly this year) members characterized items as "petty things ... innocuous, routine things ... peripheral issues." These SICs would prefer to talk about the academic program, attendance, teacher morale, teacher evaluation, and how to get "more democratic input without fear of retaliation."

In all SCCs parents expressed some dissatisfaction with the "blase" topics considered and a preference for "less PR [public relations] and more substance." In two schools parents were not able to specify the issues they would rather discuss, in part because they were not sure what items were legitimate. As one parent put it: "What else can we talk about?" In six schools, however, parents suggested greater attention be given to a variety of topics: the role of the SCC, minority representation, curriculum, staffing, discipline, needs assessments, parent training, and student tutoring.

Core Domains

In this study the term "core domains" embraces the topics we view as

central aspects of decisionmaking at the building level. We define the core domains to include: budget, personnel, program goals, and program evaluation. The manner and extent to which these subjects are addressed by SICs and SCCs differs somewhat across schools. Yet, common patterns are evident in all cases. We focus on the common patterns and qualify those with brief mention of the exceptions.

Budget. SICs discuss budget issues in a somewhat piecemeal fashion. SICs talk about fundraising, the distribution of one time discretionary monies or extracurricular stipends. SICs see the capital improvements list and, occasionally, the cost sheets for specific programs, projects, or staff additions. There was no evidence to indicate that SICs analyze the building budget en toto. The budget, or parts of it, may "get presented" but "very little is said." Informants offered two reasons for the limited attention to budget matters. First, the budget was seen as "cut and dried," as "set by the D.O. [district office]" Second, the budget was seen as administrative turf. The words of one respondent capture the prevalent sentiment: "The principal decides how the extra money is to be spent. That is [his/her] territory. The SIC reacts and approves."

SCCs address budget issues much like the SIC. In most cases segments of the budget, notably the cost of capital improvements, are shared with the group. Other items may "get mentioned" or "gone over." In one case members stated that "huge reports are handed out" so the "principal can sign something to show [s/he] had discussed it [the budget] with the SCC." In another case members recalled receiving "a fact sheet" for "rubber stamp approval." The reasons given for this summary treatment of budget are that "It's not the parents' business ... That's the SIC's role; " and "No one [except the

principal] knows much about the budget."

Personnel. SICs address personnel issues in a somewhat episodic fashion. Most informants reported that the SICs were not closely or frequently involved in discussions of hiring procedures, in interviews of applicants, or in evaluations of employees. Personnel issues surface primarily when the building career ladder positions are considered or contested, when the district mandates a reduction in the work force, and when the teacher(s) become the subject of a colleague's or parent's complaint. This pattern suggests that, although SICs do not define personnel policies, they are sometimes asked to address personnel problems. When personnel problems are referred to the SIC, members tend to portray that overture as "administrative dumping." Several added that they "resent being used as a scapegoat for what the principal is supposed to do."

SCCs are less involved with personnel matters than the SICs. The hiring, interviewing, and evaluating policies are rarely mentioned as issues addressed by SCCs. School employees reported: "We try to stay away from personnel concerns [in the SCC]." Parents also reported: "The administration limits participation in this area." Personnel items surface primarily through involvement on career ladder committees, the presence of a specific complaint, or, in some instances, recommendations for the school's response to a reduction in force directive. Although parents express a desire to be informed about personnel policies, administrators and teachers on the SCC view this domain as "off limits" for parents. School employees typically stated that "Parents don't have the skills to do this ... It's not part of their expertise ... It's the principals role ... Parents shouldn't be talking about teachers."

Program Goals. SICs consider program goals in an intermittent and, in their

words, "superficial" manner. Four of the SICs studied did not discuss program goals this year. Two councils did discuss reading, writing, and/or gifted programs. Other SICs stated that they "looked at" the district goals and "recommended some changes" in the building schedule, in staff assignments, in extracurricular or supplemental activities (eg, science fairs, field trips).

Like the SICs, the SCCs see the district's program goals and occasionally "recommend things." When members were asked to describe their discussion of program goals, their comments indicate that the dialogue is centered on program management more than program content, on supplemental activities more than regular course offerings. Interview sources could recall talking about student-teacher ratios, block scheduling, and yearly calendars; they could recall initiating or reacting to proposals regarding latch key programs, field trips, after school clubs, cheerleading procedures, dress codes, student recognition assemblies, enrichment options and the like. Their comments did not include reference to course objectives, instructional outcomes or curriculum emphasis.

Program Evaluation. Three of the SICs studied reported that program evaluation was not addressed this year. The other five SICs had mixed responses. Individuals noted that they were given an opportunity "to vote on the principal's suggestions;" that they "discussed lunch and recess times;" that they "revieved the schedule, course offerings and staffing needs" and that they "were told about tests and things."

Most SCCs described their program evaluation discussions in terms similar to the SIC. That is, SCCs revieved calendars, recommended time changes, and gave reactions to extracurricular events. SCCs discussed supplemental instructional programs such as foreign language and instrumental music in

elementary schools, academic honors, and field trips. Course enrollments were mentioned; the comparability of course offerings at east side and west side schools was questioned.

Although parents expressed a desire to be informed about program matters, administrators and teachers reportedly "protect" this domain. Educators expressed reservations about the propriety of parent input in program areas through statements such as: "I'm not sure parents should influence curriculum at all ... That's what we know best so parents shouldn't meddle ... Parents need to let those who know handle these things."

When data regarding the SIC and SCC's consideration of topics in core domains are aggregated, the following observations can be made:

SICs and SCCs receive some information about the budget. Sections of the budget may be presented, but interaction is limited by the perception that this topic falls outside the expertise and authority of council members. The budget is viewed as a predetermined, administrative matter.

SICs and SCCs may consider personnel items, but in a sporadic, ad hoc fashion (ie, as a problem arises). Even though some SIC members would like to discuss teacher assignments and evaluations, there is a tendency to view personnel items as the "administrator's territory." There is evidence of tension between the SIC and the SCC regarding the propriety of parent/patron involvement in personnel matters. Both administrators and teachers question the quality and legitimacy of parent input in this area.

SICs and SCCs may or may not address program goals and program evaluation. When program goals are addressed, the pattern is to read and at times react to the district's statement of goals. With few exceptions, the SICs and SCCs do not initiate, define, or prioritize program goals for their buildings.

Program evaluation seems to be confined to operational dimensions, such as scheduling and timing and, on the SCCs especially, supplemental or extracurricular activities. There is evidence of tension between the SICs and the SCCs regarding the desireability of parent/patron involvement in program issues.

How Are Issues Processed By The Councils?

To analyze the SIC and SCC decisionmaking dynamics, we divide the decision process into three stages: setting the agenda, managing the disagreements, and selecting a response. At each stage of decisionmaking, our focus is on a characterization of the process, an identification of the key actors, a description of their resources and strategies, and an explanation of the perceived impact that key actors have on the decision dynamics.

Setting The Agenda

This stage of decisionmaking encompasses the process through which a problem or concern gets translated into and introduced as an item for the group to address.

Setting the SIC Agenda. Procedurally, the SIC agendas are characterized as open and flexible. SIC members across all sites consistently noted that faculty and staff could put an item on a sign up sheet (either posted in the main office or circulated to faculty); submit an item to the principal, the SIC chair, an SIC member; or, in some instances, bring the item to the SIC meeting and introduce it personally and directly. Interview sources stated that the sign-up sheets and the "other" or "miscellaneous" categories meant "There is no problem getting on the agenda ... You just have to bring it up."

Operationally, the SIC agendas are characterized by faculty and staff (not principals) as closed for several reasons. First, irregular meetings

limit the SICs capacity to address topics of concern. Three of the SICs studied did not hold monthly meetings this year. As members noted, the spontaneous, "as needed ... impromptu" schedule meant that "there is no constant on-going meeting for things to be brought up." Second, teachers are reluctant to raise controversial or "difficult" issues. At two sites, hesitence was evident in general comments such as "people feel threatened" and in a recurrent concern about "being labeled" as a "troublemaker;" coming across as "unpleasant" and "argumentative." At one additional site, reticence was especially pronounced. Teachers stated:

> Depending on the topic, vindictiveness occurs...This happens through innuendo, behind the back remarks that ruin your reputation and your chances for advancement.
>
> At school, teachers learn to survive. Trying to push issues gets one in trouble...Teachers don't support each other like they should. One person can't push unpleasant issues. No one vants the image of problem confronter...They get labeled, ignored.
>
> I'd like to speak my mind, have opinions ...but I have to be a 'yes man'...teachers are extremely vulnerable...Can ve deal with improvement issues without destroying school image?
>
> Most are concerned for the principal's comfort ... If [s/he] is caused discomfort, the person is made to feel liable.

Whether raising particular issues would actually result in damage to one's personal or public image, whether confronting certain issues would result in collegial rejection, isolation or sanction cannot be ascertained from the interview data. What can be said is that some teachers are constrained by the perceived personal and professional consequences of "rock the boat" behavior. At three sites teachers contended that the competition for career ladder placements will further restrict their willingness to initiate "challenging" issues.

In all cases the principal was clearly identified as the key actor

in the agenda setting stage of SIC decisionmaking. At one school informants noted that the agenda is "the directive of the principal" because s/he prepares, prioritizes, and prints the document. At four schools, the principal exerted substantial influence because s/he did not use a printed version and/or did not schedule monthly meetings. Informants maintained that in these situations, the SICs talk about "what the principal instigates."

At three schools the SIC chair was also viewed as a key actor at the agenda setting stage because s/he aggregates and orders all the topics submitted. Sources acknowledged, however, that the chairs typically confer with the principal before they finalize the agenda. Their comments suggest that while SIC chairs may be "clerically" responsible for the agenda they are substantively influenced by the principals' priorities. The explanation for this relationship resides in the expertise and authority resources of the principalship. Two comments illustrate: "(S/he) knows more than we do, I guess ... You can't pit yourself against your boss."

As we analyze the descriptions of the agenda setting phase, we note several reasons why the principal can, and in most instances does, yield considerable influence. First, the principal is in a position to screen the district office directives and determine which, if any, get forwarded to the SIC. This positional advantage appears to be significant because many of the items considered are reactions to district level initiatives (eg, reduction in force, approval of goals, distribution of "extra" stipend monies). In the words of one SIC member: "We talk about a lot of Central Office things that the principal brings in." Second, in schools that do not hold monthly SIC meetings it appears that the responsibility for scheduling the "as needed" meetings is granted to the principal. Even though SIC chairs acknowledged that

they too can convene the group, they "never do." By calling (or not calling) a meeting the principal in these schools can control the timing, and perhaps the content of the agenda. Third, the faculty and staff do not come to the SIC with a "counter agenda." Most members, as previously noted, join the SIC to be informed and to serve. Many view core domain issues as administrative prerogatives, not council territories. They do not bring to the SIC a clear or focused set of alternative items. Moreover, some are unwilling to risk initiating a discussion of "problems." Almost by default, the principal can determine the SIC agenda.

Setting the SCC Agenda. Procedurally, the SCC agendas are described as open and alterable. Although parents in all cases and teachers in some cases were not sure how to get an item on the SCC agenda, they assumed that they could just call the principal, the SCC chair or the SCC secretary. Most reported that they could "probably just bring things up anytime" during the meetings or initiate concerns under the "new business" category.

Operationally, the SCC agendas are described as confined and set. Agenda items are often initiated by the principal, the SIC, or the district office. Agenda formats are often characterized by "a lot of reports" from the principal, the SIC, or the district office. There is little time for "other" items to be introduced.

The key actors at this stage of decisionmaking include the principal, the SIC, and the SCC chair. In one school respondents noted that "the principal just handles it." In the majority of schools, the principal meets with the SIC to talk about "what we want to bring up in the SCC." The SCC agenda then, "is filtered through the SIC." The SCC chair was perceived to have influence at the agenda setting phase primarily because

the position gives this individual the formal responsibility for agenda preparation. In cases where the SCC chairs assume the responsibility for agenda preparation, they typically "pick up the lists [of topics] from the principal" and "talk about the things that need to be brought up." In these "planning sessions" or "executive committee meetings," informants reported that the "principal helps the committee see what is most important." While the SCC chair may have some impact on the topics and clear responsibility for the logistics, in most schools, the principal, or the principal in conjunction with the SIC, initiate and prioritize the SCC agenda.

The ability of the principal and the SIC to influence the SCC agenda is grounded in the presumption that they "know more about what is going on around here." It is also grounded in the unified position of the principals and teachers regarding the "off limits" topics. Their ability to shape the agenda is further strenghened by the reluctance on the part of some parents to raise issues pertinent to them. Their comments illustrate: "We don't know what's really going on at school ... I don't want to point any fingers ... I don't want to upset people." The perception that they may not be adequately informed, the sense that they may appear to be personalizing issues or "looking for trouble" apparently restricts the willingness of some parents to place "problems" on the agenda.

Managing The Conflict

This stage of decisionmaking refers to the process through which competing interests and preferences are diffused, deflected, compromised or otherwise accommodated by the group.

Managing SIC Conflicts. There was little evidence of issue conflict in the SIC. Both administrators and teachers reported that SIC members

had "few disagreements;" that there is "quite a bit of consensus;" that conflict is "not very heated." When disagreements occur, they are usually related to career ladder or reduction in force issues. Differences are typically "ironed out" in the SIC through the development of a compromise position, a referral to a subcommittee, a request for more information, or a vote of the members. In some instances the SIC may take the issue to the full faculty and call for a vote of the full faculty. Issue disagreements tend to be moderate, infrequent, confined to personnel items, and handled, for the most part, within the SIC group. A number of conditions interact to restrict and contain issue conflict.

First, the SICs are homogeneous groups on experience, personal trait, and impetus for membership dimensions. It may be that members "think alike" on most issues.

Second, agenda topics are frequently of low salience; they do not evoke divergent or intense responses.

Third, multiple item agendas and confined time frames limit dicussion and dissension. Printed agendas usually have four to ten items listed for consideration. At one site where printed agendas are not used, interview sources reported that the SIC "gets together if we have ten items or so on the list." At another site where printed agendas are not used, interview sources reported that the SIC convenes "when we get four or five items." Since most SICs schedule early morning meetings, their "time is up" when the students arrive for classes. Although respondents recognized that items not discussed can be "carried over," they also recognized that this arrangement "leaves only time to rubber stamp."

Fourth, members contended that they are reluctant to raise "difficult"

issues because they get "labeled;" they jeopardize their opportunities for professional advancement; and, they anticipate "vindictiveness ... reprisals."

Finally, the emergent group norm appears to be one of conflict minimization and/or avoidance. Informants underscored the need to be "pleasant ... harmonious ... cooperative ... agreeable." When members "push" that norm, disagreements may be "cut off" or "smoothed over" by the group: "Questions are anvered before they are half way out of your mouth ... I've seen sharp, tough questions just get 'glossed over'... You learn to keep the peace." This norm moderates the expression of different viewpoints. SIC members reported, for instance, that they are "less critical ... in a rut;" that "maintaining pleasantness creates a vacuum ... The real message is shut up and do what you are told."

The principals in all cases and the SIC chairs in three cases were viewed as key actors at this stage of decisionmaking. The principals' formal authority, information base, and verbal skill were identifed as potent influence resources. SIC members acknowledged their deference to authority in comments such as: "After all, [s/he] is the boss ... We recognize that [s/he] takes the flack when things don't go right ... People just seem to accept the boss's opinion ... You learn to take [his/her] lead ... Few challenge [the principal's] authority ... Teachers who take it seriously get in trouble." SIC members acknowledged their response to informational and verbal resources in comments like: "[S/he] just talks us into things ... [His/her] arguments can swing the group ... [S/he] is able to restate problems so that we agree." Members reacted to the principals' exercise of influence in different ways. Some viewed it as "democratic" and "artful." Others felt "railrodded ... railroaded...buffaloed." Whatever the personal reaction, the consistent

observation was that "the principal usually prevails."

The SIC chairs' capacity to influence council disagreements was attributed primarily to their willingness to "listen to everybody" and their ability to "phrase a middle ground." Interpersonal style and verbal skill were, for them, the primary influence resources.

Managing The SCC Conflicts. There was little evidence of issue conflict on the SCC. Interview sources from all perspectives noted that meetings were "mostly informational ... friendly ... pretty calm ... very cooperative ... civil." Although one principal stated that SCC meetings "sometimes get hot," others maintained that members "rarely disagree." When differences occur, they seem to be prompted by personnel items (eg, reduction in force or projects which require teachers to "go the extra mile") and program items (eg, suggestions for new course offerings or concerns regarding "class time lost" for social/extracurricular activities). Undoubtedly there are a wide range of forces that contribute to the low issue conflict. The data suggest several factors that at least partially account for this dynamic.

First, SCC parents are homogeneous on experience, personal trait, and motive for membership dimensions. They come to the SCC by invitation of the principal, a PTA officer, and/or an acquaintance. They have a record of previous involvement in school activities. It maybe that personal similarities and prior contacts create a group that "thinks alike" on most issues.

Second, the SCC meetings generally follow an "information down" format and a definite "end time" schedule. Thus the opportunity for discussion of salient issues is constrained.

Third, the members are, albeit for different reasons, reluctant to raise

"problems." Educators expressed a concern for the "image of the school," the reputation of the teaching profession, and the autonomy of educators, particularly in personnel and program domains. Parents stated that they "don't know enough to disagree" and that they may not be "asked back" if they come across as "a troublemaker."

Finally, the emergent norm in this group parallels the prevalent norm of the SIC. Conflict is minimized and/or avoided. Disagreements are "curbed ... avoided ... shelved ... squelched" as group members "change the subject ... promise to look into it ... listen until you are tired of talking, but then never respond to what you are saying." A principal succinctly articulated this normative dynamic: "There are occasionally outspoken parents and teachers but the process works to soften them."

While there was little evidence of issue conflict, there was considerable evidence of role conflict. Relationships between professionals and patrons are strained. Although the intensity of the tension varies across cases, it was evident in all cases. The tension manifests itself in different ways.

First, teachers tend to distance themselves from the SCC. They may not attend meetings or they may go more as "quiet" observers than vocal participants. In some instances teachers are apprehensive about "parent interference." A prevalent sentiment is that parents might "stir up problems that don't really need to be addressed." A prevalent observation is that parents "need to let those who know do it." In other cases teachers disown their SCC affiliation with comments such as: "I'm not a member of that group, thank heavens" (even though as an SIC teacher one is automatically an SCC member).

Second, administrators described the SCC as a "forced marriage." The SCC was termed a "redundant" organization by one administrator. Another principal concurred by saying: "After all, we have the PTA." For at least three principals, discomfort with the SCC was related to not knowing "what parents are really trying to accomplish" and a concern for finding and walking "the tight line between teachers' rights and parents' rights."

Third, both teachers and principals view the SCC as a separate parent group that is an "auxilliary" for the SIC, not as an integrated group that is an equal to the SIC. This separation is especially apparent in the description of the "decision flow." SCC recommendations are often referred back to the SIC for ratification. The need for such a step is puzzling, since the SIC is present, in the same meeting, as a component of the SCC.

Fourth, parents commented on the ambiguity of role definitions and the discomfort of this "confusing" situation. The words of one parent capture the prevailing sentiment: "Nobody really knows what they are supposed to do." As a consequence, there is "little interaction ... We mostly just shut up and listen." There is also some frustration. Parents acknowledged: " It is hard for me to do nothing ... I want to get to work ... I'd like to help more but I don't know quite what we can do ... There is so little interaction, it's a farce."

Informants from principal, teacher, and parent perspectives stated that "relationships are fine on the surface, but there are real tensions behind the scenes." Clearly, the professionals and the parents "try to get along," but they appear to be a "civil", not a cohesive group. The factors which contribute to professional/patron tension are numerous and complex. The data suggest, however, that educators may not trust the intentions of parents;

district-level definitions of council authority and responsibility are not clear to participants; building-level units have not typically addressed, let alone resolved this tension in their groups.

The principal in all cases and the SCC chair in several instances were identified as participants that exert substantial influence during SCC meetings. The principal's influence was derived from positional authority, presumed expertise, and acquaintance with all members. Select comments illustrate: "You listen to the principal. After all, [s/he] runs the place ... The principal is just so much better informed ... [S/he's] the only one that knows all the parties involved, and that's a real advantage." Whether the SCC meetings were portrayed as a "forum for the principal" or a forum "to ventillate", the principals surfaced as the key actors in the group.

The SCC chairs' influence was based on their verbal and interpersonal skill. They had "a way of saying things ... an ability to put things into the right words ... a way of bringing together in a statement, the item of concern" and a "nice touch with people ... a calming effect on people." These assets helped them "direct the flow" of discussions and develop "suggestions for handling" the item at stake.

Selecting The Response

A group can "bring closure" through a continuum of responses. A group can discuss a topic, recommend action to others, make a binding decision, and/or affirm a decision already made by different actors.

Selecting a Response in the SIC. Informants typically characterized the SIC's mode of operation as "making recommendations ... advising ... offering suggestions" and as "endorsing somebody else's decision ... approving what the principal wants ... rubberstamping ... taking token action." Although SIC

members are reluctant to raise "difficult" issues, members reported that discussion is also used to resolve agenda items. The option to "air" topics, "ventilate" concerns, "talk over" problems is apparently viewed as a useful method of handling some matters, notably "gossip ... rumors ... misinformation" about school employees or school activities.

SICs make few binding decisions. When the SICs make "final" decisions, the issues are generally classified as "day to day building operations" or "translations of district directives." The SICs reported that they have been able to make decisions about calendars, schedules, procedures for handling disruptive student behavior, and the like. SICs also reported that they have been able to make decisions regarding how a district directive, notably a reduction in force, will be applied to their buildings. Members recognized that the major decision - whether a staff position is cutback - had been made elsewhere. Yet they perceived that the subsequent decision - how the staff reduction will be handled in the building - has been made, in several instances, by the SIC. On managerial and implementational aspects of issues, SICs have made binding decisions.

When the SICs make binding decisions, the principal is either fairly neutral on the issue or fairly eager to "dump" the issue. Informants maintained that SICs rarely "go against the principal's position." As one teacher explained it: "When [the principal] lets [his/her] opinions be known, you learn to follow suit." Thus, if the principal is uncommitted on the issue, the SICs can make "the final" decision. Moreover, if the principal prefers to share the responsibility for a decision, or, as principals put it "take the heat off", the SIC is allowed to "make the call." The most prevalent illustration is deference to the SICs for decisions regarding how controversial reduction in

force mandates will be followed.

Clearly, the central actors at this stage of decisionmaking are the principal and the district office. The resources of the principalship are seen as formidible. SIC members across all cases defer to the authority and the expertise of "the boss." SIC members across all cases react to district office mandates. And, SIC members perceive themselves to be constrained by district level policy even when they may not be sure of what the policy parameters really are. The influence of the principal and the district officials is enhanced because faculty and staff bring modest expectations and few concrete demands to the SIC. These individuals are reluctant to voice their concerns, let along mobilize their resources on behalf of those concerns. Further, these individuals tend to rely on the principal to implement any SIC decision made.

In sum, the prominent role assumed by (or granted to) the principal, the presumption that district policy has constrained SIC options, and the reluctance of members to "make waves" are conditions which shape the SICs' response. As a result, SICs make few binding decisions. Most responses are affirmations, recommendations, and discussions. The prominent pattern is to rely on the principal to execute whatever response is made. This finding is corroborated by results of the faculty surveys. Teachers generally perceived SICs as bodies that make recommendations, but also make or affirm decisions on occasion.

Selecting a Response in the SCC. Informants maintained that the SCCs made few, if any, binding decisions this year. Occasionally the SCC was perceived as the actor which set parent conference schedules, determined fund raising projects, made certain facility-safety improvements or secured

adjustments in extracurricular programs. More often, the SCCs were described as groups that discussed topics, made recommendations to the principal or the SIC, and affirmed decisions made by others, notably the principal, the SIC, or the district office. There are many factors that prompt the SCCs to operate in what can be termed a "typically listen and affirm, occasionally react and recommend" capacity.

First, the SCCs are not cohesive. Professional educators view the SCC as a "parent" organization. The professional educators interviewed for this study are rather unified in their belief that parents should not "interfere." As a result the professional educator component of the SCC acts to constrain the parent component. Given this internal tension, it would be difficult for any group to yield substantial influence, let alone actually make building level decisions or mobilize to influence district level policy.

Second, because they are "part time" actors not full time employees, the parents' opportunity to influence decisionmaking is restricted. It would be difficult for any group that convened for only an hour or two a month to function as anything other than listener or advisor.

Third, as previously noted, parents come to the SCCs by invitation and with "learn and support" objectives. These parents tend to defer to the authority and the expertise of the principal and the SIC. They also tend to abide by the norm of low conflict, minimal disagreement. Perhaps these predispositions alter the willingness of parents to exert greater influence.

Finally, parents indicated that they do not really understand what the SCC can and cannot do. Parents who had served on the SCC for several years, parents who had attended district training sessions, parents who had a record of substantial involvement in school activities all maintained that the role

of the SCC was "fuzzy ... confusing ... unclear." Their basis for asserting a more active role is thereby limited.

At this stage of decisionmaking, the principals and the SICs surface as key actors. Their authority, expertise and full time status give them a relative power advantage in shaping the SCCs responses. Since the district's definition of the SCCs role is somewhat ambiguous, the principals and the SICs can mold that role. Since the principals and SICs view the SCCs as auxiliary parent groups, the SCCs tend to function as affirmers, recommenders, and discussers. Further, the principals can exert additional impact because the SCCs tend to rely on these individuals to implement whatever action is taken. Although parents reported that SCC decisions have "fallen through the cracks" or "been shelved", most maintained that the SCCs "count on" the principals to "handle the follow through" to implement the few actions taken by the SCC.

Again, results of the faculty surveys are consistent with interview respondents' accounts of council processes. Teachers who responded to the survey generally perceived the SCCs to be bodies that make recommendations, discuss issues, and affirm others' decisions, but make few decisions of their own.

What is The Impact of The School Councils?

Our effort to assess the impact of the SICs and SCCs is confined to assessments of their effect on school policy, school operations, educator-patron relationships, and individual council members. While it is difficult to determine direct cause and effect relationships, the participant perceptions provide a basis for judging the impact of site councils.

Impact on School Policy

The SICs and SCCs have little influence on the establishment of school

policy. Neither council is actively involved in the core domains: budget, personnel, program goals, and program evaluation. The data suggest that the councils rarely address these issues at the building level. The data further suggest that councils rarely lobby these issues at the district level. Members indicated that SICs and SCCs have limited interaction with the Board of Education or the district administration. Although members of SCCs occasionally meet with board members or district administrators, in all of the examples recounted by informants, the contacts were aimed at obtaining a specific, concrete benefit for a single school (eg, an inservice program, a staff addition, a facility improvement). Apparently councils do not engage in concerted campaigns to alter district policies or operations.

The SICs and, to a lesser extent, the SCCs influence the implementation of school policy. Once policy parameters are set, the councils do have some opportunity to discuss, recommend, and at times determine how a particular directive will be applied in their buildings. The prominent example cited across schools is the councils' response to reduction in force mandates.

Impact on School Operations

The SICs and SCCs reportedly influence the day to day operations of the schools. The councils serve coordinating and troubleshooting functions. They provide a channel through which information regarding school activities, school calendars, and special events can be exchanged. They provide a forum through which recurrent problems, such as disruptive student behavior, can be addressed. Both councils provide a vehicle for airing complaints, venting concerns, or otherwise deflecting or defusing potential problems. Despite the common observation that members are reluctant to raise difficult issues, the existence of a forum for expressing discontent is important in and of itself.

Principals, teachers, and parents all reported that the school site councils have a "calming effect" on the schools.

Impact On Principal-Teacher-Parent Relationships

The SICs and the SCCs function to maintain traditional relationships between administrators and teachers, educators and patrons. Principals maintain their authority by exerting substantial influence on council processes, and in the case of the SCC, particularly, substantial influence on council composition. Principals augment their authority by using the councils to buffer themselves from the repercussions of difficult decisions. The responsibility for decisions on divisive issues, such as reduction in force, can be shared with the group.

Educators maintain their autonomy by exertng substantial influence on the role played by the parent component of the SCCs. Educators viev the SCCs as an auxilliary "parent" organization. As members of the SCC, educators manage council processes in vays vhich reinforce the belief that information vill be shared vith parents but that decisions vill be made by educators. Parents typically defer to the expertise and authority of the professionals.

The traditional authority relationships are strengthend by the personal interactions that occur in the councils. Both teachers and parents develop empathy vith the principal. They develop an understanding of the complexity of school operations and an appreciation for the difficulty of the principal's position. Informants typically stated: "I see the big picture ... Involvement has led to a greater understanding of the problems ... [I] understand the many hats of the principal ... [I] understand better the pressure [s/he] faces ... This would be a tough school for any principal to deal vith." As a result, teachers and parents are "less critical ... not so quick to judge

... more sympathetic."

Parents also empathize with teachers. Despite the limited participation of teachers on SCCs, parents explained that they became better acquainted with teachers and learned to appreciate them: "[I] got to know them ... [and have] more respect ...[I have a] greater understanding and appreciation for teachers ... I am more tolerant. They [teachers] have a difficult job to do."

The empathy that develops among principals, teachers, and parents as a result of interactions on site councils reduces the likelihood that traditional authority relationships will be challenged. Thus, both the formal and informal operations of the councils function to reinforce the traditional relationships between administrators, teachers, and parents. The traditional pattern, one in which the principals and teachers determine what goes on in schools and parents provide support, is maintained.

Impact on Participants

Generally, both SIC and SCC members voiced enthusiasm for the concept of shared governance operating through school-site councils.

SIC Participants. Teachers and principals were generally positive in their appraisals of their SIC involvement. Over ninety percent of the teachers interviewed reported that they would be willing to serve again on the SIC, and that they were optimistic about affecting school policy. They explained that participation on SICs gave them a voice in decisionmaking and kept them informed about school matters.

SCC Participants. Principals and teachers, however, were less enthusiastic about their involvement on SCCs. Given a choice, many teachers would not serve on the SCC. This perhaps stems from the general attitude among teachers that the SCC is an organization for parents. Two principals echoed this

attitude when they commented that the existence of the PTA made the SCC redundant.

Parents, on the other hand, were generally pleased with their participation on the SCCs. While a few complained that SCCs really do not address major issues and exert little or no influence in the governance of schools, over ninety percent of the parents interviewed said that they would be willing to serve again. Most parent informants also expressed optimism about affecting school policy. Parents, like teachers, reported that their involvement provided them with a voice in school decisionmaking and kept them informed about the operation of the schools.

Sources of Participant Satisfaction. In light of our findings that school-site councils do not address core domains and tend to maintain traditional authority relationships, how is it that SIC and SCC members remain optimistic about the concept of shared governance? Our study points to three factors.

First, council members tend to be positive about the relationships they develop with administrators, teachers, and parents as a result of their involvement. As reported, teachers empathize with administrators, and parents empathize with administrators and teachers as a result of their interactions on the councils. Thus, the satisfaction felt by members may not be tied to the nature of the issues addressed or the specific tasks accomplished in the councils.

Second, neither teachers nor parents typically joined site councils to pursue specific objectives. As we reported earlier, teachers join SICs to acquire information, to participate in the system, and to serve. Similarly, parents commonly join SCCs to become informed, to be involved in their childrens' education, and to serve. Whether or not the site councils address

core domains, they do provide information about school matters and enable members to serve the school. Thus, members generally meet their expectations for joining site councils.

Third, council participants are elected or invited. For parents, particularly, the invitation to participate is perceived as an "honor". The opportunity to participate in the governance of schools may be interpreted as an affirmation of the individual's capacity to contribute. Again irrespective of the issues considered or the tasks accomplished by the councils, an invitation to belong and an opportunity to participate seem to be intrinsically rewarding for some individuals.

PART III

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides support for a series of conclusions regarding the Salt Lake District's Shared Governance Policy. The conclusions crystalize the themes which emerged as we analyzed the participants' perceptions of their experience with this policy.

Composition of Councils-Concept of Representativeness

The profile of participants indicates that the councils do not reflect the diversity of their communities most notably on the ethnicity dimension. Both SICs and SCCs are predominantly Caucasian. Minority representation is almost nonexistent. If shared governance councils are to be microcosms of the community, then the composition of the councils illustrates that a critical aspect of representativeness has not been attained.

Uniformity of District Regulations-Variance of Site Council Operations

The district has established explicit guidelines regarding the formal operation of shared governance councils. For example, SICs and SCCs are to hold regular meetings, use prepared agendas, and maintain written records of council proceedings. Yet, there is considerable variation in the extent to which shared governance councils adhere to these procedural requirements. Councils may or may not meet regularly. Councils may or may not prepare agendas, keep or disseminate minutes. The variation is not related to the grade level or the socio-economic features of the school.

Maintenance - Alteration of Traditional Authority Relationships

The existence of shared governance councils has not significantly altered the formal authority relationships of principals and teachers or educators and parents. The principals exert substantial influence on the composition of

site councils, on the establishment of agendas, the management of disagreements and the final decisions of site councils. Principals also use the councils to defuse controversial issues or attribute responsibility for difficult decisions to the committee as a whole. Thus, their authority is not undermined. Rather, it is enhanced.

Shared governance councils maintain the traditional relationship between educators and parents. Educators, notably principals, retain control of the core domain issues at the building level. Principals retain control of the management of schools; teachers retain control over instruction. Parents have a channel through which they can be informed of school activities and a vehicle through which they can provide support for those activities.

Discrepancy Between Policy Principles and Policy Implementation

The Shared Governance policy sought to establish site level councils that were substantively different than previous faculty committees and parent advisory groups. The cornerstone of this policy is the principle of parity. All parties (administrators, teachers, and parents) are to have equal power in the making of school-level decisions. The principle of parity requires that the authority to make decisions about school-level issues be redistributed. The findings of this study show that the relative power, ie, the decisionmaking authority, of these parties has not been altered.

However, one should not interpret this conclusion to mean that school-site councils have served no useful purpose. They have served as forums for input. Participants reported that they have developed an understanding of the complexity of schools and a resulting appreciation of the challenges faced by principals and teachers.

Strong Endorsement for the Continuation of Site Councils

Although some members expressed frustration with the operation of their councils, most participants voiced support for the concept of shared governance. Educators were more enthusiastic about the continuation of SICs than SCCs. Principals endorsed SICs because they provide a "sounding board" and a "safety valve." Principals saw the SICs as a means to secure teacher input, garner staff support, and improve staff relationships. Teachers saw SICs as a means to acquire information and have a "voice" in the making of school decisions.

Both principals and teachers expressed reservations about the SCCs. The SCC is a structural reminder that schools are subject to parental scrutiny. Since educators are concerned about their image and their autonomy, there is an inevitable tension between professionals and patrons. Despite these reservations, many educators recognize that the SCCs are valuable channels for dispensing information about the schools and useful vehicles for moderating criticisms of the schools.

Parents strongly endorsed the continuation of the SCCs. Parents view the SCCs much as teachers view the SICs. The SCCs are a means to secure information about the schools and have a "voice" in the affairs of the schools. Regardless of the actual operation of the SCCs, parents remain committed to the concept of shared governance.

Apparent Need for Role Clarification and Council Training

Participants uniformly indicated that they were unclear about the role of either council. Members who had years of experience on site councils, members who had attended training sessions, members who had a strong record of involvement in school affairs agreed that there is a need to define the place

of site councils in the governance of schools.

Teachers and parents maintained that their councils would benefit from training which focuses on the manner in which members can express concerns without fear of "being made to feel libel." The problem does not seem to lie in individual members of the councils but in the group dynamics that characterize council processes. Therefore, all the participants from each school may need to be trained together.